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Ministry of Forests

REC PLAN CREATES JOBS FOR ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES

CLEARWATER – A local plan to manage Forest Service recreation sites that led to jobs for four adults with developmental disabilities offers an innovative model for other communities, Forests Minister Michael de Jong said today.

The Wells Gray Community Resource Society hired the four workers under its Challengers program to help it maintain 22 recreation sites in the Clearwater forest district.

"When we invited communities and users to manage Forest Service recreation sites, I was confident we would see some creative ideas," de Jong told a gathering at the Lolo Lake Recreation Site near Clearwater. "Challengers is one of the best examples of community partnership and creativity I have seen so far. It shows how the transition to community management can encourage innovative hiring practices and meet local needs."

"Thanks to this wonderful opportunity, we secured community and federal support to create part-time jobs for people who are gainfully employed for the first time in their lives," said society executive director Jack Keough.

The Wells Gray Community Resource Society, which offers integrated health and social services in the North Thompson Valley, provides activities and job coaching to adults with development disabilities through Challengers. It received support for the recreation site maintenance program from Human Resources Development Canada, the Slocan Group's Vavenby Division, Weyerhaeuser Co. Ltd., the North Thompson Indian band and the Clearwater and District Chamber of Commerce, as well as other local forest companies.

Kamloops-North Thompson MLA Kevin Krueger encouraged community groups to follow the lead of the Wells Gray Community Resource Society. "More than anyone else, we know the value of having campsites at places like Moira Lake and Silvertip Falls," Krueger said. "Community involvement will ensure that one of our greatest natural resources – the outdoors – can be enjoyed by visitors and locals alike."

To support the government's goal to restore sound fiscal management, the Ministry of Forests announced earlier this year that it would focus on its core stewardship and forest management duties and gradually withdraw from the management of Forest Service recreation sites and trails. It is maintaining about 600 sites and 170 trails this summer, and will continue to administer agreements with organizations managing sites and trails on a non-commercial basis.

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"Community groups across British Columbia are interested in managing recreation sites and trails, and many – like the Wells Gray Community Resource Society – are already working on agreements with their local forest service offices," de Jong said.

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